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Nathan, Maud

The housekeeper and the
ballot

Warren, O.

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#29

The Housekeeper and The Ballot

By **MRS. MAUD NATHAN**

President of the Consumers' League of New York City

We are often told that the home is woman's proper sphere. I have been a housekeeper for over 25 years. There is not a department in my housekeeping that is not affected by politics.

The immigration question affects the servant question. The tariff question affects the prices of the materials which we buy to furnish our homes. Municipal politics force themselves upon our attention daily. If the streets be not clean, it is very difficult to keep the home clean. If the garbage and refuse be not taken away regularly, it is difficult to keep the home in a sanitary condition. If, through politics, the hose of the fire department be rotten, what redress has the non-voting housekeeper? If the Police Department be inefficient or corrupt through politics, in what way are our homes protected against burglary?

The milk that is furnished to us at our door every morning is supposed to have been inspected carefully in the dairies; but if the Health Department fails to do its duty, if the inspectors are appointed, not through efficiency but through political affili-

ations, then we are in danger of having disease in our homes. If the meat sent to our table comes from slaughter houses which are filthy in the extreme, or if it has come from tuberculous cattle, which we are told are being dumped into New York because there is no regular provision for the inspection of cattle in our state, then what redress has the non-voting housekeeper? The groceries may be so impure that they could not be sold within the borders of another state which is not as lax in this particular as our own. In fact, I happen to know that some of the food which we purchase in New York City is being prepared and packed in dirty tenement hovels. An inspector of the Consumers' League last year found in a dirty tenement room, nuts being picked by a young girl with a tuberculous hand, and these nuts were being packed, without being cleaned, in a jar marked "Health Food."

We women are taxed for everything in the home. We are taxed for the ground that we occupy, for the water that we use, for everything that we eat and drink and use and wear; and we are told that "taxation without representation is tyranny." But, when applied to human beings of the feminine gender, it no longer is tyranny.

We are told not to meddle with politics. Politics meddle with every department of our home, and of its environment. Politics decide whether a saloon shall be at the corner or whether a gambling house shall be

in the immediate vicinity to entice our boys, and whether we shall have adequate transportation facilities, so that our home may be accessible to the family circle and friends.

Politics interfere with the education of our children, and, if we are working women, politics actually control the regulation of our employment. Indeed, it is through my interest in the Consumers' League, a society formed for the purpose of ameliorating the condition of working women, that I became interested in the suffrage movement.

I found that the demands of the women, their pleas for justice, were constantly pushed aside, as, for instance, in the matter of low pay for teachers and for prison matrons. May I say here, as one of the ladies on the other side said, that there is equal pay for sanitary inspectors of New York City, that I know something of that matter? I have been an inspector without pay of the Health Board of New York City for some time. I mean that I was honorary inspector. They were very glad to appoint me an honorary inspector without any remuneration, but those women who were sanitary inspectors of the Board of Health were asked for their resignations, and those who refused to resign were dismissed, on the plea that there was no money to pay their salaries. Therefore at present we have only men sanitary inspectors in the Department of Health in New York City. When I saw that the demands of the women were pushed aside because they were of no politi-

cal importance, it seemed to me that if I really wished to uplift the working women, I must work for their enfranchisement.

This is no undeveloped theory. It is a fact proven already by the results obtained, for instance, in Colorado, where women are enfranchised. In Colorado there is equal pay for equal work done by employes of the State, and in Colorado women hold responsible positions, political positions, and they are not deprived of their positions, as was the case recently of a post-mistress in a neighboring village to ours, whose position was wanted by a man who wished to use it for political purposes. She had served the state faithfully, but that made no difference. Her position was taken away from her. In Colorado the woman who has served three terms as State Superintendent of Public Instruction states that the women use their power as voters to improve the conditions of their homes. Instead of taking less interest in their homes, the interest has increased. The first thing that they did was to establish manual training in the schools and chairs of domestic economy in the State Agricultural College and State Normal School; and Mrs. Grenfell says that interest in the old-fashioned womanly arts has actually increased since the women have had votes.—*Address delivered before the Judiciary Committee of the New York Legislature, Feb. 19, 1908.*



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